

## *Letters*

### **On assisted suicide, "theological", South Africa, Greece, Afghanistan, China, pop tunes**

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#### **What hope for Afghanistan?**

SIR – You reiterated the same upbeat expectations for Afghanistan that NATO officials have long trumpeted ("[Towards a better land](#)", October 27th). Yet despite the cheerful assessment, not one Afghan army battalion can operate independently of American advisers. A third of soldiers abandon their posts and refuse to fight. How such a fragile force of phantom troops will stave off civil war after 2014 remains unexplained.

You maintain that "support for the Taliban is limited." That is false comfort. The Taliban persist in the face of heavy losses with a seemingly limitless pool of recruits and cross-border sanctuary in Pakistan. Focusing on the Taliban also ignores the northern non-Pushtun insurgents, who harbour legitimate grievances against both foreign forces and the Afghan central government.

Finally, you think that speeding up troop withdrawals will jeopardise progress. What will undo any promising gains is not withdrawal per se, but Afghanistan's competing nationalisms and ethnic and factional differences. Sadly, those dynamics have proven to be impervious to the presence of foreign troops. One of NATO's biggest mistakes was to pay insufficient attention to Afghanistan's internal politics.

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